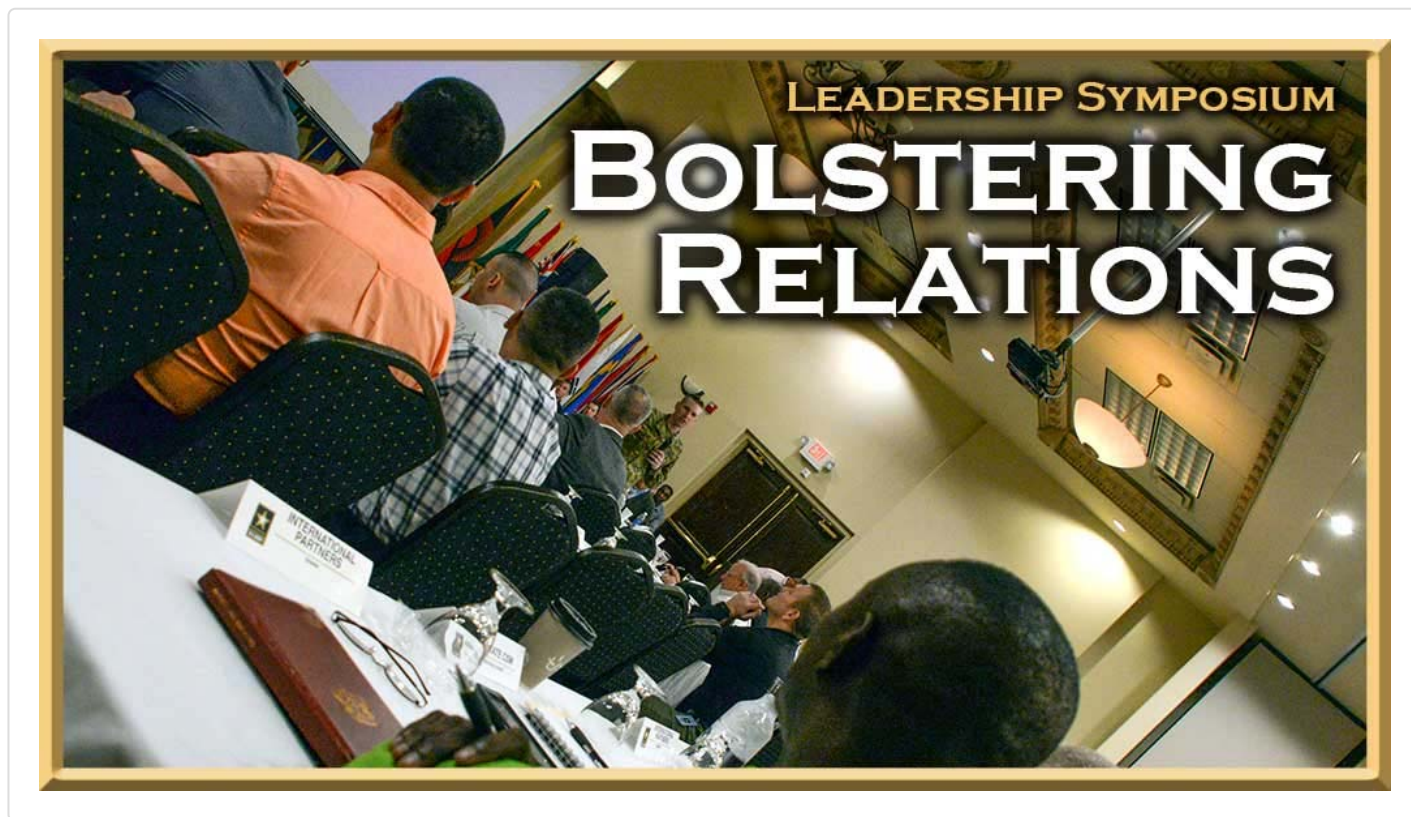


Senior Enlisted Leaders, International Counterparts Can Shape RAF Approach

By Pablo Villa - NCO Journal

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Command Sgt. Maj. Steven M. Payton has watched closely as the U.S. Army continues to make progress on its Regionally Aligned Forces mission.

As the sergeant major of G3/5/7 operations and plans, Payton has been privy to details concerning RAF since its inception in 2013. He shared some of those details with Army senior enlisted leaders and their international counterparts from 55 countries April 13 during the second day of the International Training and Leader Development Symposium at El Paso, Texas. The aim of the three-day event was to reinforce the importance of a quality noncommissioned officer corps, to foster international partnerships, and prepare U.S. senior enlisted leaders for the tasks they face as part of a fast-changing Army.

Payton outlined the basic RAF concept to attendees, describing how the fluid structure of the U.S. Army in a drawdown climate affects the strategy's principles when trying to properly assist partner nations. Though the tenets and statistics behind the RAF concept are firm, Payton concedes its intricacies and strategic approaches are malleable.



Chief Warrant Officer Dickson Owusu, foreground, the forces sergeant major of the Ghana Armed Forces, listens as Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey speaks April 13 in El Paso, Texas, during the second day of the International Training and Leader Development Symposium. The event was attended by U.S. senior enlisted leaders and their international counterparts from 55 countries in an attempt to reinforce the importance of a quality noncommissioned officer corps and to foster international partnerships. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones)

“The numbers themselves tell a story,” Payton said while describing how the 187,560 Soldiers engaged in RAF missions are spread throughout the world. “But the story they do not tell is what goes along with it: how we work with our teammates in a collective effort across the globe.”

The Regionally Aligned Forces project was borne out of the 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy, which instructed the U.S. military to strengthen existing allied and partner relationships, as well as to pursue new partnerships. A key role of the defense strategic guidance was regionally aligned, mission-tailored forces, which would be rebalanced to the Asia-Pacific region while maintaining a commitment to Middle East partners.

A regional alignment flags Army units of various sizes to prepare to support combatant

commanders as they deal with mutual threats and interests with partner nations. The support is offered in the hope that any given nation's defense forces can handle security issues without involving U.S. forces. Under the current RAF structure, an Army unit of varying sizes will be assigned to one of the U.S. military's six geographic combatant commands — U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Southern Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. Pacific Command, U.S. European Command and U.S. Africa Command.

The opening stages of the RAF plan rolled out during the past three years, and the process for Army units to become regionally aligned is ongoing as it follows State Department direction to assign brigades to particular geographic combatant commands. Brigades aligned under the RAF concept lean heavily on NCOs to carry out their missions. In turn, those NCOs must be able to rely on their international counterparts to ensure that partner nations can reach their goals. That notion is part of what spurred last week's gathering, Payton said. After laying out the vital elements of the RAF mission, Payton challenged the symposium's attendees to keep those concepts in mind as they headed to their respective breakout sessions with enlisted leaders from their specific geographic regions.

"This presentation is meant to be a tool to shape what you do when you move out to your breakout groups," Payton said. "Ask yourself, 'What do we want to accomplish?' We want to generate discussion. I presented to you what we see through the eyes of our commands and what they're telling us that they're accomplishing out there. What is key is to also remember that we, as the United States Army, are deployed around the globe. Our partner nations are deployed around the globe as well. What best practices do they have that we all can learn from? What should we be doing? What should we *not* be doing? We want to build upon what we currently have in place. We want to become better at what it is we want to accomplish collectively and individually."

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey echoed those sentiments.

"This is all about what you put into it," Dailey said. "This is focused on giving the state partners, the secretary and the COCOMS the ability to bring the team together regionally so you can break out and discuss things that you want to work on in the future, initiatives that you want to work on. This is just to confirm, 'Hey, here's where we're headed.'"